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SERMON XXV.

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ADVANTAGES OF DENOMINATIONALISM.*

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."—Eph. iv: 4.

THE Holy Scriptures teach us to believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; in one perfect and sufficient Mediator, who "once for all" offered a sacrifice; and in "one Spirit," whose office is "to convince of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come."

On this three-fold personality, divine, conjunct, and one in essence, attributes and purpose, rests the imperishable faith of the one holy catholic church. This church, is the body of Christ. And this body Christ the head fills with his fullness of wisdom, truth, righteousness, love, and grace, and thus causes it to be the perpetual manifestation of himself, until the end shall have

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come, when the Son will deliver "up the kingdom to God, even the Father," after he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power, adverse to his sceptre.

The church thus destined through the omnipotence of its divine head, to survive all disaster and overcome all opposition, dates its existence back to the utterance of the first promise and the first prophecy. Descending through the earlier ages, under successive dispensations, Antediluvian, Noachic, Patriarchal, and Levitic, it at length touched the wonderful morning on which "the Day-Spring from on high" disclosed the advent of the long expected Messiah. Dropping then its Aaronic vestments; forsaking the old altars of typical sacrifice; exchanging its temple on Moriah for the "man crucified" on Calvary; and bursting its Judean boundaries; the church of the elder dispensation, beginning at Jerusalem, went forth to disciple all nations, and on the wrecks and ruins of ancient empire, to establish a kingdom against which the gates of Hades, can never prevail.

If history utters any prophecy from the lips of experience worthy of our implicit confidence, it is that this church, ransomed from the destroyer, by the shed-blood of the Life-Giver, is as immortal as its head. Time that wastes all else, but invigorates it, and death ravaging all other dominions, falls palsied and defeated before the indestructible walls of Zion.

An earnest study of the church,—its origin, history, attributes, functions and mission—reveals as no other study can, the presence of God in the earth. And for this reason no other department of human research has engaged the attention of so many minds, nor filled with the rapture of hope so many hearts. While, indeed, an entire unity of opinion respecting the church as seen in any single phase, has never yet been reached anywhere nor at any time, still the voice of prayer for the prosperity of the Bride of the Lamb, has always been heard, in the tabernacles of the righteous and every worshiping assembly, pours forth its ceaseless petitions for the coming of the day, when "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow unto it."

As this discourse is to contain an exposition of "*The Advantages of Denominationalism*," presented in a way which may promote the spirit of Christian fellowship, it will be necessary first of all to show, if it can be shown, that the existence of different and even of many denominations of disciples is consistent with a universal belief in the being of only "one holy catholic church." For if the existence of such denominations is not consistent with this belief, then Christendom is in truth filled with schisms and schismatics; and EVIL, not *advantage*, must result therefrom to the church as a body—and to all its members, if indeed it be allowed to have members or parts.

It is universally admitted that a distinction must be made between the *visible* and the *invisible* church.

The one is an ecclesiastical organization, a visible and real government, with officers, laws, rules, customs, rites and ceremonies, for the administration of discipline ; the regulation of public worship, and the education of its subjects in religious knowledge.

The other—the invisible church—consists of all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth, who “believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that Jesus” is the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners.

Furthermore it is agreed that membership in the visible or external church does not, in and of itself alone, render salvation sure, but that a real union with Christ by faith in his blood, does. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved—he that believeth not shall be damned.”

The question next arises—a question hitherto of endless debate—whether the invisible church is contained in and under only one visible ecclesiastical organization? The tridentine council affirmed that it is so contained, and that any organization assuming to be a church, not subject to the Roman See, is in a state of schism and of revolt, without covenant mercy, and doomed to perdition, unless it repent and return to its obedience to the Roman pontiff.

A similar style of prelatial assumption in these later days has manifested itself in other quarters, boldly demanding compliance with certain external forms and ritualistic usages, under penalty of loss to all recusants. Both claims spring from the same source, are animated by an identical spirit, and lead alike to a narrow and pharisaic exclusiveness which has nothing in common either with the letter or the spirit of the gospel. These claims are so preposterous and monstrous as to be abhorred even by charity itself. Well may they be remitted to the purgatorial *limbus* of outworn errors, and of exhausted fanaticisms. They do not deserve the serious attention of those who have found a more excellent way of “understanding what the will of the Lord is” concerning his church and his people.

Rejecting then the papal and semi-papal notion that the invisible church is contained only within the limits of a single visible organization—we proceed to consider in brief the prevailing Protestant conception of the visible church. This perhaps is as well expressed in the XIXth article of the church of England as in an other formulary. That article is as follows :

“The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”

With this all the Reformed Confessions agree in form and substance. But the Belgic, Westminster and Savoy are more comprehensive, as they include in their definition of the church "all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children," making the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God.

According to the Belgic Confession the marks of a true church are these : "If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein, if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, if church discipline is used in punishing of sin ; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church."

Concerning the character and foundation of a true church, in his *Exposition*, Bishop Burnet argues thus : "There can be no other way taken here but to examine first what makes a particular church ? And then since the catholic church is an united body of all particular churches, when the true notion of a particular church is fixed, it will be easy from that to form a notion of the catholic church." He then proceeds to show that inquiry must first be made as to the fundamental points of the Christian religion before any attempt is made to settle upon modes of administration. The ground taken by Bishop Burnet is the common ground occupied by the Reformers, viz. that where the truth of Christ is not, the church can not be ; and that any society, however organized, which denies the cardinal doctrines of the gospel is not a church but a synagogue of Satan. If, then, we are willing to believe that wherever the gospel is truly preached, the sacraments are rightly administered, and proper discipline is maintained, that there the church is, it follows plainly enough that all denominations who hold and obey these essential truths are parts and members of the holy catholic church of God on earth.

A mechanical or ecclesiastical unity is not required by the sacred Scriptures, as being essential to the existence of the church universal. Nor is there any one form of ecclesiastical government which can claim a divine institution to the exclusion of all other forms. There are three kinds, and only three kinds of civil government, viz. monarchical (limited or absolute), republican (resting on popular representation), and the democratic, in which the people administer their own affairs. All these forms of civil government are divine in their origin. All exercise powers ordained of God, and all have their providential spheres of eminent usefulness. So, too, there are but three kinds of church government, viz. the prelatical, the presbyterial, and the congregational—corresponding in their modes of administration to monarchy, republicanism and democracy ; and these also have

their distributed places in which they may cultivate their portion of the common field. It is by no means impossible, nor even difficult, to discover the germinal existence of these three sorts of ecclesiastical government among the primitive churches. The somewhat indefinite way in which the apostles interchange the terms, bishop, overseer, and presbyter, and the manner in which they express the salutations of particular churches, afford ground for something more than conjecture, that they who planted Christianity throughout the Roman Empire were far more zealous in their efforts to propagate essential doctrines than they were to organize each separate church under a uniform and universal order of administration. They not only inculcated a certain liberty of conscience in respect to non-essentials, but even insisted that the power of the Holy Spirit was displayed through a diversity of offices, gifts, and operations.

What may be said against the license of abuse as witnessed in every age, from the beginning until now, can not be counted as a valid objection to the enjoyment of that regulated Christian freedom, which not only had the sanction of apostolic example, but which was expressly permitted by inspired direction. We hold it, therefore, for certain, that particular churches or denominations, differing from one another in their modes of government, yet conforming, more or less, to the scriptural outline, and holding together the doctrines of the common salvation, are *true* churches, members one of another, and parts of the body whose supreme head is Christ. This is not *schism*, but rather the sublime order of a supernatural *system*. The several members of our planetary family as they rotate around their central sun are not antagonistic to each other. They dart their subtle and reciprocal influences unseen, indeed, by mortal eye; and yet science has taught us to believe the movement of each essential to the balanced harmony of all. So, too, in sacred ranks and beauteous spheres the several parts of the ransomed church revolve around the Sun of righteousness, receiving light and life, and love from his benignant face.

Denominations have received their distinctive titles in these three ways: from their form of government, Presbyterian, Congregational or Episcopal; from a specialty of administration, as for example, the Baptists; or from local causes, national or transient. Thus we have the state churches of the old world named after the countries in which they are located; and the Methodists carrying, with becoming thankfulness, a designation first bestowed upon them in partial contempt for their unwonted enthusiasm; and the Moravians preserving, in their historic course, the memory of that portion of Bohemia, over which the eloquence of John Huss once resounded.

This reference is here made to the origin of the names of the

members of the historic and orthodox family of denominations, for the purpose of drawing particular attention to the fact, that the lines of difference which seem to separate them lie mainly upon the surface of their external organizations and do not sunder that vital unity of faith and spirit which is found both in doctrine and in life.

This most obvious truth warrants a supposition at least that, underneath differences of name, organization, and government, there may be cultivated after all such a fraternal oneness of feeling as will oblige all Christian denominations to confess that they are but parts of one Body, sanctified by one Spirit, and animated by one Hope.

If strict regard be had to the points in which most evangelical churches agree, it will be found that there are really fewer denominations in the Christian world, when tested by the standard of doctrine, than is commonly thought. This is plain at a glance. The Protestant world is comprehensively divided into Reformed and Lutheran, or still more broadly, into Calvinistic and Arminian. If we classify churches in this country by the rule of concurring formularies, we discover at once that the entire Presbyterian Family, the Orthodox Congregationalists, the Episcopalians and the Baptists, each and all are strictly Calvinistic in creed, holding in common the same vital doctrines. Separated from them by metaphysical theories respecting the freedom of the human will, are the Methodists and Lutherans, and yet these are in accord with all Calvinistic bodies, in regard to the human fall, the necessity of supernatural regeneration, the cleansing efficacy of the blood of atonement, the general Resurrection and the final Judgment.

I have taken time, my friends, to recall these important matters to your recollection, partly because the mere statement of them contributes to allay sectarian animosities, and to promote instead the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace—and partly because I am unable to treat the theme which has been assigned me in this series of union sermons, unless I am allowed to show that the *advantages of denominationalism* are entirely consistent with the exercise of a common trust in one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism of the Holy Ghost. As we value our national Union upon the basis of its one organic Constitution, because it holds together many states, each having a distinct government, and yet every one necessary to the welfare of every other, so too we must cleave to the original faith of one holy catholic church, under whose divine constitution there are component parts, which support, invigorate, and defend the whole body into which they are compacted. In enumerating some of the advantages of denominationalism, I mention,

- I. The advantage derived from a proper compliance with

the Divine Law of adaptation. This law underlies and supports the harmony of the world. Its presence is seen in every department of nature with which we are conversant. Fishes find their congenial element in water, birds in air, flowers in sunshine, and man himself is but the hundred-fold illustration of the beauty and beneficence of this omnipresent law. All his physical senses are so arranged as to fit the material conditions of his earthly estate. The eye is adjusted to the light, the ear to sound, touch and taste to the qualities of things, while the faculty of smelling is made a busy critic on what is agreeable or offensive. But the human body is no more controlled by this law than is the human mind. Its faculties, tastes and aptitudes, are all provided for in the immeasurable domain over which the human soul expatiates. And as we find some minds by an antecedent impulse are carried into the region of science, others into that of literature, and still others into the walks of practical art or of busy traffic, so we must respect this law as it displays itself in the religious world among the several existing denominations.

After we shall have made all allowance for the place of one's birth, his early education, and social surroundings which may result in determining his denominational preference, still it is most true that each denomination has its individual church life, its *cultus*, its psychological character as clearly defined and as positively distinct as though the denomination were a single person. I need not here undertake to point out the peculiar traits found in the church life of the various evangelical bodies. It is enough to know that they differ. A family of children reared at the same board, nourished by the same kind of diet, and clothed with similar raiment, presents oftentimes an astonishing variety of tastes, and the cunning skill of the educator consists in properly providing for this contrariety or diversity of tastes, so that all may come up to ripe and healthful maturity.

Thus our divine Master nourishes his children upon the same bread of life, gives them all of the immortal water of his spirit, clothes them with his own righteousness, but provides nevertheless that as they are growing up in him, they may grow precisely with such congenial surroundings as will further the work of grace in their hearts. To one class of minds, one form of worship is cold and cheerless, while another form may catch the rising spirit of worship and open the gate of heaven to the saint's enraptured view. We all understand right well that the human mind is everywhere influenced in its choice of objects, methods and associations, by affinities of taste, feeling and thought; and it is impossible to exclude this law of elective affinities from the sphere of positive religion. The Romish church has tried it, but tried it in vain. There are indeed more denominations, that is to say, more orders, and more sub-divisions in the Papal

church, than there are in the Protestant evangelical church, regarded as a whole. One advantage then of denominationalism is, that it not simply tolerates, but amply provides for, the religious training of the masses, in modes adapted to the largest diversities of Christian taste.

II. Denominationalism nurses an active and even *intense* desire to prove what is true according to the Scriptures, and to demonstrate what is false according to the same authority: The final appeal of every Protestant denomination is to the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and practice. And what, I ask, has ever contributed in a human way so much to the study of the sacred oracles as has the Christian scholarship, which every denomination has been obliged to foster for the purpose of contributing its share to the aggregate work of elucidating them? If there were but one organized body of Christians, that body would be likely to claim prescription as authority for its every dogma, rite and ceremony. It would imprison the human mind in a cave, covered with the rubbish of the dead past. It would tolerate no curiosity, and condescend to give a reason for not a single article of faith. It would render human progress impossible. For then the church would become all in all, and the Bible nothing; then the flaming eye of the soul would be eclipsed by cumbersome clouds of human authority. Then the world would be enslaved, and the church would be its unreasoning master. Then Anathemas would take the place of argument, and he who could not be driven to heaven by the lash of ecclesiastical power, would be thrust down to eternal darkness for the simple crime of wishing for light. The religious controversies of past and modern times, often conducted in an improper temper, were nevertheless inflamed with zeal for the truth; and this zeal has been repressed by no fear of labor, and by no fear of man. For it was zeal for the truth of God's word. As in the heavens, star lights star, and worlds flash their reciprocal splendors, and mighty systems shine in and through one another, producing in their aggregate glory, the resplendence of the milky-way, the path in which angels travel shaking star-dust from their glittering wings, so over the dark sky of human error have the various bodies of the Christian host reflected back and forth, from and to each other, the glowing doctrines and shining promises, and far-reaching prophecies of the sacred Word, so that together they walk in light, waiting and watching for the rising of the eternal day, when the Lord God shall be their sun forever.

It is plain to the dullest eye that this careful study of the sacred word on the part, not of rival, but of sister denominations, followed by a corresponding elevation of practical piety, has been of immense advantage to all. The learning, liberality and zeal of one denomination, enlarge the measure of these in all

others. The advance of one is the increase of all. Thus, in sisterly emulation, they "strive together for the furtherance of the gospel." If at times there be frictions and jars and momentary collisions, resulting from mistake or haste, or even from wicked passion, still the blessed truth remains, that all these are as nothing compared with the mutual trust and goodly fellowship and tolerant charity, which live and shine among the ranks of the Christian army, moving forward upon the field of conflict against a common foe.

Denominations do purify, strengthen and encourage each other in their work. This is an advantage shared by all.

III. Denominationalism is the mother and nurse of civil and religious freedom. The profoundest and the most powerful element in human nature is the religious. When that has been thoroughly aroused to consider the great problems of good and evil, right and wrong, it can not be hushed to silence, nor will it tire in its task. Yet the performance of its task is absolutely impossible, unless it have liberty to think, investigate, decide, and act. Once allowed this liberty, it insists upon its exercise in all things, civil as well as religious; and therefore history has taught us to formulate the maxim, that freedom in the church is freedom in the state. Leaving argument aside, and appealing to the authority of plain, notorious facts, we are forced to accept this maxim as containing a great and precious truth. For only those countries have been blessed with civil liberty wherein protestant freedom has struggled even unto the death of its confessors, for the right to worship God according to the requirements of his own word. All the historic churches in turn, in former ages, have been persecuting churches, so that, while looking backward, we can not but deplore the seeming fatuity which seized them. And yet, out of the very fires they kindled to consume their opponents, emerged the radiant angels of religious toleration and charity. Now each denomination is a check upon every other. The rights claimed by one are of necessity claimed for all. And thus denominationalism fosters freedom of thought, of investigation, and of action in all human concerns. Centralization, the world over, is synonymous with oppression and tyranny. "The Empire is Peace" because it is absolute power. A union of co-ordinate parts, adjusted to the reciprocal interests of each other, is the basis of regulated liberty in the state, and equally so in the church.

Should we come to have a national ecclesiastical establishment, or if any one denomination shall be allowed to gain a preponderating political influence in this hitherto free country, we shall then have a fierce, intolerant and persecuting power, corrupting politics and religion alike by its base and ambitious passion. We can not too closely watch, nor too strenuously re-

sist any tendency toward so fatal a consummation of politico, priestly ascendancy. As the tribes of the ancient Israelites were bound to guard the ark, so should, and so must, the Christian denominations of our land, defend, protect and maintain that banner of equal freedom under which they have hitherto marched from victory, to victory.

IV. Denominationalism contributes very much toward the general evangelization of the people. I am aware that many persons are of a contrary opinion. They say, that the claims of many denominations conflict and render the popular mind indifferent to all alike. But they are mistaken. In countries where religion is established by law, the people are church members by law. Nominally then, they are Christians. But all travelers in foreign parts concur in saying that the masses are not found on the Sabbath in state churches, but in denominational conventicles. In this country we have had an open and a fair field, and what has been the result? In no other country in the world has so large a proportion of the people of all ages and conditions been brought under the direct influence of Christian teaching and of church association as in this. Such a result must be ascribed to the activity and vigor of denominational life, which develops its resources in its own way for the sake of doing good wherever opportunity is granted. Under cover of Christian zeal there may oftentimes appear something of the arrogance and ambition of denominational exclusiveness, but even gold has its alloy, and it must be confessed that the reigning spirit of brotherly fellowship has commonly been stronger than the selfishness of sectarian blindness.

Other considerations could easily be presented to illustrate the advantages of an enlightened, liberal and tolerant denominationalism. But time does not warrant their enumeration now. It is proper, however, to observe, that some of the real advantages which result from a denominational brotherhood, may be partially neutralized by a failure to cultivate a habit, of observing the broad basis of concord upon which all evangelical churches have the right to meet.

If we unduly magnify what is external and transient; if we insist more upon peculiarities of government than we do upon the common doctrines of salvation; if we regard the mode of administering sacraments as more important than their meaning; and if we fence the Lord's table with restrictions which he has never imposed, then, indeed, we may succeed in nursing a sectarian jealousy and a divisive spirit odious in the eyes of the world and offensive to Him who prayed that his disciples might be one, that the world might believe on the Son of God, who is the head of the church militant and the glory of the church triumphant.

But let us confess gladly that on all sides, there is a disposition shown to cultivate the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. Sectarian rigors relax. Denominational prejudices are giving way. Schemes of practical union and coöperation are considered, and the non-essentials of worship, of dogma, and of government, are treated as secondary to the catholic faith in the creed of the primitive church, and to the supreme importance of the vital truths of our common Christianity. The controversies of earlier days have been mostly buried; and Calvinists and Arminians, Prelatists and Presbyterians, are consulting how they may make a united stand against the common foe, and conquer the world for the King of Zion. This tendency to union of spirit, heart and purpose, needs to be prayerfully and strenuously encouraged by the adoption of such practical measures as will give it voice and power.

The Evangelical bodies of England and France have formed alliances, which, though without ecclesiastical power, do nevertheless combine the efforts of all for securing the largest success for the word of life. Why may we not have in this country a synod, or convention, or association, made up of delegates from the several denominations, and meeting annually or tri-annually for the purpose of unifying more completely the feelings and sentiments of the several denominations? If such convention were called upon the basis of the cardinal doctrines of the gospel alone in which a general agreement exists—the so-called scandal of Protestantism would cease. Then we should present a united and compacted front, and every eye would perceive that our several denominations, while doing their own work in their own way, are nevertheless in very truth members one of another—believing in one body, one spirit, and one hope of their calling.

SERMON XXVI.

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ADORNING THE DOCTRINE.

“That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”—Titus ii. 10.

THE church of Christ in apostolic times was constituted in a manner somewhat different from its present state. The formal

agencies for the diffusion of the gospel were then more various and remarkable than now. There were gifts of a supernatural kind, such as tongues, prophecies, interpretations, which were distributed among the disciples in that age, but which disappeared entirely from the church within a century after our Lord's ascension. And the question may occur, whether it was upon any of these extraordinary and temporary means that the early believers chiefly relied for the spread of the gospel? This question we may answer at once in the negative. For it must be evident to every careful reader of the New Testament that whilst a certain importance was attached by the apostles and the first disciples to these peculiar offices and qualifications, yet the great reliance of the church was then as it is now upon two powerful agencies, which alone and inseparably survive—the Truth, and the Life: the truth of God, as announced and expounded by the voice of the preacher, and the life of godliness which must accompany and illustrate the word proclaimed. It is to the latter of these kindred agencies, or rather to the close and inevitable connection that subsists between them, that I now call your attention. What can every believer do, to contribute to the efficacy of the gospel among men? The answer to this question is our subject. The chief work of every Christian is to make religion lovely. Religious truth, as expressed in the Word of God, can receive nothing of embellishment or enrichment from the works of man. The law of the Lord is perfect. Without the adhesion or obedience of a solitary creature, the glorious gospel of Christ would be just as worthy of esteem and homage, as it is now, or as it will be when the angel having the everlasting gospel shall have preached it to all that dwell on earth. But religion as a system of faith, made known by human agencies, requires for its complete expression the Christian life, with all its recommending graces. The doctrine must be adorned in all things. Consider then,

First, THE DOCTRINE ; and

Secondly, THE ADORNING.

I. First. The Doctrine ; that is, the truth as taught ; and more explicitly, the truth concerning God our Saviour. This teaching, as men are put in trust with it, we shall regard in a three-fold light ; as

A system of faith held by the church of Christ ;

A message proclaimed by his servants ;

A profession made by individual believers.

In each of these senses, the doctrine of God our Saviour is to be adorned.

(1.) As a creed, or system of belief, religion demands this adorning. It is incomplete and ineffectual without it. The Bible, whence alone are derived those elements of truth which are embodied in the

creeds and confessions of evangelical Christians, is a rule both of faith and of practice. This will appear from the very structure of the word of God. Salvation by grace as there announced, is the doctrine of sober, righteous, and godly living. Much of the Bible is biography. In this Holy Book are not only "written excellent things in counsels and knowledge," but likewise admirable examples of those who through faith obtained a good report. An important, a very attractive part of Scripture is that which relates the acts and sufferings of the righteous under both dispensations. What would the Bible be without its records of good men's lives : without the story of patriarchs, prophets, judges, kings : of disciples, apostles, martyrs ; and especially without the life of

"A witness nobler still—
Jesus, at once the Finisher,
And Author of our Faith?"

Precious indeed for its doctrinal teachings ; for its precepts and commandments, warnings and consolations ; yet certainly curtailed of its most delightful features, and far less "profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." If this be true of the Bible itself, much more may we say, that the Truth as reproduced in uninspired language, as rendered in articles of belief, or other standards of doctrinal correctness, requires, in order to be fairly presented before the eyes of men, a life that shall reflect, that shall adorn it. Apart from this, it is feeble and powerless. Divorced from this, it is but half truth at best. Orthodoxy without vital piety, the creed without the living church, is religion spoiled of its costliest ornament. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." "From such, turn away." It is the body without the spirit : or rather, it is the skeleton without the flesh.

(2.) Secondly. Religion as taught from the pulpit, requires the illustration and embellishment of the Christian life. The ministry of reconciliation is God's chosen and sanctioned instrumentality for diffusing and preserving "the doctrine which is according to godliness." We are not in danger of setting too high a value upon the faithful preaching of the Word. That the Saviour should in all ages have chosen and ordained among his people some who should be stewards of the mysteries of God : that he should make them able ministers of the New Testament, inclining their wills and affections to the care of souls, enlarging their minds to some suitable apprehension of the truth, nourishing them up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, preventing on the one hand their departure from the simplicity of the gospel, and on the other their discouragement in view of the trials almost inseparable from their calling—this is a marvelous grace and blessing, for which our daily thanks and praises should

ascend to God. Without an earnest, intelligent, laborious ministry, dark indeed were the condition and prospects of the churches! Soon would "the thorn and the thistle come up upon their altars" (Hos. x:8), and their candlestick be removed out of its place. But is this enough? Is the preaching of the word, however faithful, an adequate exponent of the Truth as it is in Jesus, without that testimony which consists in the corresponding lives of his people? Is the beauty, the fragrance, the completeness of the Gospel, as the "doctrine which is according to godliness" expressed by the message of salvation, when it goes forth alone and unsupported, as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness," a report by none believed, by none reduced to practice? Far from it, my brethren. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." The doctrine requires to be adorned by the living virtues of its professors. To set before the eyes of men the excellence of religion, true and undefiled, it is not enough that some should preach it. There are "epistles of commendation" that must accompany our message. "Ye are our epistles, known and read of all men; manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." Where is it then that the doctrine of God our Saviour, has its brightest earthly manifestation? It is where the preacher of the cross stands surrounded, supported, confirmed by witnesses chosen of God: "speaking wisdom among them that are perfect;" his images of piety mirrored in creditable examples; where for every doctrine stated there is an obvious parable in the person of some believer, whose "manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, afflictions" are "fully known." It is where the doctrine is adorned. But oh! how feeble and ineffective the rendering of that truth, when instead of "shining lights, holding forth the word of life," there are to be seen in the congregation and the church, those who are "spots and blemishes, clouds without water, trees without fruit!" When the preacher has to mourn that he has "run in vain, and labored in vain," because the worldly life, the contradictory practice, the unmoved, apathetic state of those who ought to be teachers, but have need to be taught again the first principles of the oracles of God, are continually making the preaching of the cross of none effect.

(3.) Thirdly. Religion as professed by every individual believer, needs to be thus adorned. How solemn and affecting is the scene, where one whose heart the Lord hath touched, comes out from the world, and takes the vows of God upon him! Often has the transaction left on the mind of some spectator a serious,

a saving impression. Behold ! another witness to the power of divine grace. Hark ! another voice to say : "Whereas I was blind, now I see !" How signal a rebuke to the unbelief and vanity of the age ! What a pressing invitation to others to come and follow Jesus ! But the force of this teaching must not be confined to the moment of espousing the cause of Christ. It should attend every period of discipleship ; it should emanate from every act of a public or salient character. Be the occasion what it may ; when such a man comes to notice ; when the opinions of men are called for in regard to him, and they take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus, that he is one who professes to know and fear God, and to be a citizen of heaven : his presence, his name, should be an instant, a pungent admonition, a vivid reminder of those important truths to which, as a disciple of Christ, he has set to his seal. Such examples there are, known doubtless to all of us ; men who are a sweet savor of Christ, the very salt of the earth. And what has made them such ? Is it not that the doctrine of God our Saviour is in their case adorned, by the attractive graces which the Holy Spirit has wrought in them : namely, by "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ?" And if in other cases, alas ! too many and too manifest, the salt has lost its savor, the fine gold has become dim, what is it but that the same religion, the same profession has failed thus to flower and blossom and bear fruit ; has lacked the ornaments of humility, consistency, fidelity, sobriety, heavenly-mindedness which might add so much to its dignity and grace ? Are we to wonder that religion thus exemplified should be a by-word and a reproach ? That the more notorious and prominent it becomes, the more does a religious profession unattended with decided virtues, unrecommended by positive and recognizable traits of goodness, should provoke the censure, the ridicule, the contempt of observing men ? Of such a profession, what more could be said than the Saviour himself declares, "It is good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men ?" (Matth. v. 13.)

II. Thus far we have spoken of the doctrine ; considering it to mean religion as taught, in the three-fold sense of a system of belief, a message proclaimed, a profession of faith. Thus understood, we have seen that the doctrine, or the truth taught concerning God our Saviour, requires, in order to its efficacy and completeness, the ornament of a life that honors and reflects it. The Saviour commits to his people the precious interests of his cause. They are ambassadors for him ; stewards of his manifold grace ; vessels containing a divine treasure. Religion, of which

they are the witnesses and interpreters, has a claim to respect and admiration entirely independent of their conduct. The grace of God that bringeth salvation—the good news of “the kindness and love of God our Saviour,” how that “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saves us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, whom he sheds on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour:”—This doctrine of Redemption, wherever and however made known to men, should by its own merits, command acceptance. If announced by angels in the simplest and briefest form to a race of beings whom selfish interests and blind prejudices did not govern, this gospel would be embraced at once. But as made known to sinners of mankind, it requires the further exposition of the life. And as expressed in human language, imperfectly and feebly, it needs the confirmation of a holy life. Even thus adorned, it may fail to elicit due reverence and affection. Witness the immaculate Redeemer himself: “I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me.” (John viii. 49.) But unadorned, unrecommended by the graces of a Christian character, the truth as received, as preached, as professed by Christians, is utterly powerless and unsavory to men.

What then, my brethren, are the ornaments so positively required to set forth in a becoming and winning light the religion we would recommend? The Bible itself contains no more perfect and beautiful enumeration of them, than that which the apostle gives in explanation of our text. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us”—here it is—“that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” “Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts!” Renouncing for ourselves, and rebuking and condemning in others, not only that worship of idols, which is the rudest form of the atheism of the natural heart, and those gratifications of the senses, which are the grossest food of its desires; but all those dangerous devotions that steal away the heart from God; covetousness, which is idolatry; the love of the world, which is enmity against God; and the works of the flesh, which are not only those vile and loathsome passions that men acknowledge as such, but also “hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, envyings.”

“Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts!” But is this “*adorn-
ing*” the gospel? To renounce what the world approves and practices, will this recommend the doctrine? If our chief business as disciples be to make the religion of God our Saviour lovely, shall we consult its interests by a palpable and displeasing contradiction of prevailing tastes, opinions, usages; instead of a course of tolerance and concession that should nicely and delicately avoid on the one hand dishonor to religion, and on the

other offence to the world? Questions like these have arisen in every period of spiritual declension, and on every point of Christian ethics, as often as a new form of worldly pleasure has come up to plead with easy consciences for permission and approval. If questions like these, my beloved brethren, trouble and ensnare you, let it be enough to remember that the first requirement of your calling was a severity toward self which forever excluded indulgence in earthly delights: "If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross, and follow me." If then there are pursuits and recreations to which you are invited, on pretext of their innocence or insignificance, decide by this criterion: "Are these the things that draw the heart from God? Do they tend to ungodliness and worldly lusts? Are they akin to those practices which I myself, when convinced of my sin and danger, and urged to fly to Christ, did by the grace of God forsake and renounce, and do still in my Christian profession deny?" By the answer, let your course be determined.

But let no man doubt whether in thus renouncing and abjuring worldly things, he shall adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. For from this negative part of a disciple's duty, results a grace positive enough, which the world itself is at no loss to recognize and admire as a jewel rare and lustrous: a precious ornament of the Christian character. That grace is *consistency*! Yes, often at those very points where the Christian's narrow path crosses or diverges from their own, men are most apt and willing to perceive its heavenward direction. And often out of those very compliances for which they beg, on which they insist, men will shape the sharpest stigma for the Christian name. Fear not then to adorn the doctrine by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts; for the world well knows that the doctrine itself denies them. The religion you profess denies them. They are condemned in this Bible, and from this pulpit; they are disowned at this sacramental table; the questionable pleasures of the age, the age itself understands to be repugnant to the gospel of Christ. Believe it, follower of Jesus! when we assure you, that while hailing your accession to its follies, the world will note you as recreant to its faith. Whatever praise it shall bestow on your accommodating practice, will be given at the expense of the uncompromising doctrine you profess. The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his lord! It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. And, on the other hand, how often is it found, that those who object to the Christian's walk as ungracious and austere, are the first to detect the absence of that consistency which should adorn the doctrine he professes!

The denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts, is followed in the apostle's enumeration of the graces that recommend religion, by those which are more positive : " That we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." These duties comprehend all obligations toward ourselves, our neighbors, and God. To live soberly, is to observe a wise moderation in thought, speech, and behavior ; maintaining a well-balanced mind, a mind so much and so constantly affected by the serious matters of religion, that it shall be swayed by no intemperate passion or inordinate desire ; expressing itself in " sound speech, that can not be condemned ;" in an upright and edifying conversation ; and in conduct which, by its blameless, harmless, and benevolent tenor, shall become the gospel of Christ. And is this " sober living" an ornament of but doubtful value and importance to that religion which is first pure, then peaceable and gentle ? So the frivolity of some, and the harshness, and the intemperate zeal of others who profess it would seem to argue. But not so teaches this doctrine of salvation as it " hath appeared to all men," for it leads them to expect in every follower of Jesus " the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."—To live righteously in this present world, is to observe a strict and equal justice, according to the principles, not of the world but of the gospel ; rendering to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor ; and love, which is the fulfilling of the law, to all. We say, to observe a strict and equal justice, but not according to the principles of the world, where selfishness the most intense, if only careful to discharge monied obligations, may hug its treasures, and snatch the uttermost farthing from its lawful debtor. " I say unto you, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." No, my brethren, the justice that would adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, must use other weights and balances, than those of mammon's worshippers. Its tribute must be measured according to the shekel of the sanctuary. It must call the Samaritan its neighbor, and the Gentile its creditor, and all Christ's suffering poor its mother and sister and brethren, to whom it owes all that it can pay of helpful kindness and sympathetic love. To live righteously is to own and fulfill our liabilities, not only the tradesman whose products we consume, and the State whose protection we enjoy, but to the widow and the fatherless, the missionary and the heathen, " who can not recompense us ; for then shall we be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." And is this " righteous living" an ornament of doubtful beauty and value, to that religion which " before God and the Father is this—to visit the

fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world." So thinks the avarice that grasps at gain, and then grudgingly doles out its petty contribution. But not so teaches the doctrine of grace and salvation, as it hath appeared to all men, leading them to expect of the follower of Jesus that as freely he hath received, so freely shall he give.— And to live godly in this present world, is to maintain a close and faithful walk with that unseen Redeemer, whose image, reflected upon the soul in habitual prayer and communion, and study of his word, shall more and more shine forth as the divine and glorious ornament wherewith his doctrine is adorned, in the character and conduct of his disciple.

We have sought by these considerations to show that the chief work of every Christian is to honor the truth by a life corresponding with its precepts. We have spoken of religion as the doctrine embraced by the people of God, preached by his ministers, and professed by his individual followers; and in each light we have seen that it requires the illustration and recommendation of a godly life. How the doctrine may be adorned, we have gathered from the apostle's own amplification of the text; First, negatively, by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts; and then, positively, by sober, righteous, and godly living. We close with a few remarks in application of this subject. And first:

(1.) The duty of adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, rests equally upon all disciples. It was indeed to a particular class of persons that the exhortation of the text was addressed. That class, however, was not the wise, the rich, the mighty, but the least gifted, the most abased in the social scale. It was with reference to the downtrodden slaves of the Roman Empire, that Paul wrote thus to Titus: "Exhort them to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." What the poor, obscure bondman could do for his religion, adorning it by a patient silence, and a cheerful obedience, and a simple fidelity, the favored Christian, in a free and prosperous land, dare not refuse. The Spirit and the Providence of God address various special calls to his servants; bidding some go preach the gospel, and others take the oversight of the churches; distributing to one the gift of exhortation, to another the gift of prayer; appointing these their places among the sweet singers of the congregation and those among the teachers of the young. The call to such offices and functions each intelligent Christian must determine by the light of God's word, the intimations of his spirit, the evidence of appro-

priate gifts and talents, and the force of circumstances. No man may be urged against his own conclusions from these various marks, to take up any such special work for Christ. "Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" (1 Cor. xii, 29.) These are particular duties; but there is a duty that is universal; and that is, in whatever calling or station, to adorn the doctrine, to honor religion, as the creed, the preaching, the profession; to honor, embellish, recommend it, by a consistent life, by a sober, righteous and godly life; by this first and chiefly, whatever else we do for Christ! Are you at a loss what to do for Christ? Live for him; honor him; profess the doctrine of God your Saviour, and then adorn it. You may have other work assigned you, but for this you need await no special indication; it is not more the work of the most gifted and noted, than your own.

(2.) Again, this duty knows no discouragement or hindrance. The doctrine is to be adorned "in all things." The Christian slave, wrongfully accused, yet "answering not again," robbed of his freedom, yet "not purloining;" serving the froward, yet "showing all good fidelity;" suffering for well-doing, yet "taking it patiently:" In that abasement and obscurity and crucifixion, proving the matchless power of the blessed gospel of Christ, to chasten and sanctify and comfort.—Oh! how bright a star in the Redeemer's hand! how precious a jewel in his crown! (Rev. i, 20.) But there is no situation where the disciple is not equally called, by consistent, sober, righteous, godly living, to "prove the doctrine all divine." Is your experience peculiar, greatly differing from that of other disciples? Then is it for you to exemplify, in fresh and singular ways, the efficacy and sufficiency of religion. Or is yours the common lot, presenting no salient points of trial or privilege to the general observation? Then is it yours to add one more agreeing instance of the same grace of God our Saviour which hath appeared to all men. But every life is new; and it is given to every Christian to work out a new and valuable demonstration of the power of godliness in all things.

(3.) Lastly, the service which can thus be rendered by every Christian, in every sphere of life, is the most effectual service that any Christian can render to religion. It is a great honor to preach the gospel, and with the living voice to persuade and beseech men, that they would be reconciled to God. It is a great honor to stand for the defence of the gospel, and by means of the pen and the press to explain and vindicate its doctrines. It is a blessed and a glorious thing to profess religion, and to stand up once before the great congregation and take the solemn vows of a follower and soldier of Jesus. But it is a greater

privilege and service to spend the life, while preaching, defending, or only professing the doctrine, in adorning it with those heavenly graces which are the fruits of the spirit and the ornaments of the gospel.

"Thus shall we best proclaim abroad
The honors of our Saviour God,
When his salvation reigns within,
And grace subdues the power of sin."

Christian, will you strive to do it? Friends and hearers, will you not begin to do it? Come, let us seek to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that we may reflect and exalt and glorify the grace of God our Saviour?

SERMON XXVII.

WORKING IN GOD'S VINEYARD.

"Son, go work to-day in my Vineyard."—MAT. xxi: 28.

IN this passage our Saviour imparts to his disciples important and valuable practical instructions.

Men have their vineyards, by the cultivation of which they try to promote their own wealth and gratification. God also, has his vineyard, by the cultivation of which he seeks to advance the honor of his name, the glory of his kingdom, and the gratification of his own feelings. Men have their workmen; God has his. Some men train their own sons to labor in and cultivate their vineyards. God employs his sons to cultivate his. To all he utters the command, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

1. "Son." We are all his offspring. He is the father of our spirits, as well as the former of our bodies. My hearers, do you use the language of the Lord's Prayer? Do you say, "Our Father?" Do you own God as your Father? An acknowledgment of such a relationship implies a feeling of obligation, such as a son is under to his father. Do you possess a feeling of reverence for God, and an obedient spirit to him? Are you ready to say, "Father, what wilt thou have me to do?" If so, here what he says:

2. "Son, go into my vineyard." He said this when you were a little child, just old enough to understand the meaning of a father's command. Did you then obey him, and enter his vineyard? If not, he has repeated the same direction every day and hour

since. He has called upon you to enter his vineyard, to become pious, to give him your heart, by his word, his mercies, his chastisements; by parental instruction, by the advice of pious people and ministers, by the reproofs of your own conscience, and by the strivings of his Holy Spirit. Now, if God is your father, where is his honor? Where have you shown your regard for his authority? If you are still in an unconverted state, if you have not yet entered his vineyard, have not yet begun to serve him in sincerity and truth, do you not give him occasion to say, "Hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." "All the day long have I stretched out my hand unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." But, perhaps, you are ready to say, "I have entered his vineyard." It is not enough to enter the Lord's vineyard; he says,

3. "Go work." Many who profess to have become Christians—who profess to have entered the Lord's vineyard, seem not to understand the object for which they are called to go into the vineyard. They act as though all they had to do was to eat the ripe clusters, and ruralize beneath the cool shade, and regale their senses with the sweet odors, and gratify their eyes and their appetites with the rich flowers and fruits of the Lord's garden. They seem to have forgotten that God saves his people to serve him; that he commands them to go into his vineyard to work. Christian disciple, do you say that you have done something in the Lord's vineyard? that at such a time, in such a revival, or when you were first converted, you did converse with the impenitent, exhorting them to flee from the wrath to come; you did distribute Tracts, and attend many meetings, and contribute something to the various objects of benevolence? that you did work in the Lord's vineyard? This was so far, very well. But why have you become weary in well-doing? Is it enough that you did work a little while for the Lord? Does he allow us to work one hour and then rest the remainder of the day? No; he says,

4. "Go work to-day," that is all day, "in my vineyard." You expect pay for a whole day's work, and why should you satisfy your conscience by working only a half or a quarter, or even an eighth part of the time? If you employ a man to work for you to-day, are you satisfied if he works but one hour? But God requires us, on his authority as our Father, not only to enter his vineyard and work, but to work all day, to work till night, whether we enter the vineyard early or late. The command is,

5. "Go work to-day in my vineyard." Nothing that is done outside of the Lord's vineyard is acceptable. There are many who are conscious that they are not Christians; that they have

not entered the Lord's vineyard ; who fancy that they are working acceptably for God. They help support gospel institutions, attend meeting, give to the poor, keep the Sabbath, reverence God's name, and in general practice the duties of morality ; yea, some of them even maintain the forms of religion, and in consequence of these works of the law, they apprehend that they shall be justified before their Maker. They seem unconscious of the fact, that it is impossible for them to remain outside of the Lord's vineyard, and do work in his vineyard. They must show first an obedient disposition by going into the Lord's vineyard ; by giving him their hearts, before he will accept of their works. He says, "Go work in my vineyard." The obedient shall be rewarded. God says.

6. "Go work in my vineyard." If we were to infer from the conduct of mankind how the command of God reads, we should conclude that it reads either "Go work in your own vineyard," or "Go work in the devil's vineyard," for all men go by nature directly into the devil's vineyard, or their own vineyard, as soon as they can go anywhere. "All seek their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's." It is because men are selfish and devilish, that a command is necessary to induce them to go and work in the Lord's vineyard. If we expect the Lord to reward us, we must work for the Lord, and not for ourselves, or the great adversary.

Well, if we conclude to go and work in the Lord's vineyard, what shall we find to do ? Work enough, and work suitable for all.

(1.) Cultivate personal piety. This is to be done by studying the Scriptures to learn our deficiencies and our sins, and the way to be pardoned and purified ; by much meditation and importunate prayer ; by mortifying our carnal natures ; by cultivating the fruit of the Spirit ; by refusing to fulfill the works of the flesh ; and by constantly looking unto Jesus, as the captain of our salvation, and pressing toward the mark of our high calling.

(2.) Discharge faithfully all our duties to our fellow-creatures ; our duties as parents, as children, as husbands, as wives, as brothers, as sisters, as citizens, as magistrates, as men. Our example and influence should be such as to convince those that are without, that we are serving a good master ; a master whose yoke is easy, and whose burden is light ; and that we are satisfied with our fare and with our company, and are not disposed to leave our Lord's vineyard for any consideration. We should ever exhibit the spirit and temper of Christ ; be self-denying and laborious to advance the eternal interests of mankind at home and abroad ; pray men to be reconciled to God through the only Mediator ; try to fill up the Lord's vineyard with faithful laborers ;

be honest, charitable, kind and condescending to all men. We should be active in Sabbath-schools, in distributing Tracts, in promoting temperance, and good order, and Sabbath-keeping ; in contributing for benevolent objects. We should open our mouths for the dumb, and for such as are appointed to destruction, and imitate him who came to preach deliverance to the captive, and to open the prison doors to those who are bound. In a word, we should discharge all the duties by which God will be glorified, and the religion of the Bible extended and established among men.

We see that all men ought to go and work in God's vineyard ; that there is enough for all to do, and that those who work in his vineyard may expect a large reward when the day of life is past, and the night of death has come. Let us then enter the Lord's vineyard, at once, and do with our might what our hands find to do.

" The arduous work will ne'er be done,
Till we obtain the crown."